"Ebenezer"

The Last One-Room School

By

Valda Russell

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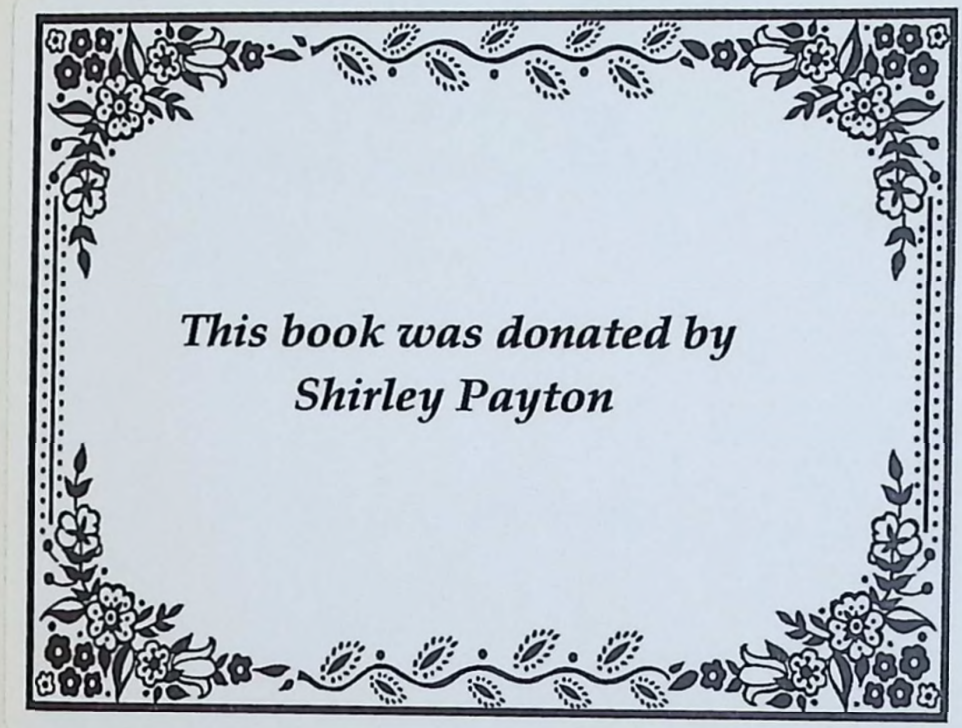

God bless you
"Miss" Valda

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"EBENEZER"

The Last One-Room School

By

VALDA RUSSELL

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by
Valda Russell
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Greensburg, Kentucky 42743

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Dedication

In deep humility I lovingly dedicate this book to my husband, Charles W. Russell, to whom I shall ever be grateful for his untiring efforts to assist me in every way possible as I struggled to succeed in my chosen career. Without him, I could never have attained my goal.

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Justifications

All Scripture quotations used in this book are from the King James Version of the Bible.

The song *That Little One Room School* was written by my sister, Mrs. Myrtle Rowe, St. Petersburg, Florida, and used by permission.

Time to Laugh is an anecdote taken from *Everybody's Business—Our Children* by Mauree Applegate and published by Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., and used by permission.

Foreword

I don't know when my acquaintance with "Miss Valda" began. In 1945 when I became Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Russell was one of our teachers. My earliest memories go back to when we were having a teacher's meeting and Miss Valda thrilled us all by playing her banjo and singing for the entire crowd in her own inimitable style.

Miss Valda is one of the most dedicated teachers that it has ever been my pleasure to know. She believed in discipline. She was firm but she was kind. Students loved Miss Valda and still do today as adults with their own families. She believed in the 3 R's and she turned out some excellent scholars in her years in the schoolroom.

For years the Green County Board of Education kept Ebenezer as a one-room school because we felt there was a learning program going on there that could not be duplicated any place else. It was a unique situation and people came from all over just to visit and chat with "Miss Valda" and see her classroom.

I enjoyed visiting Ebenezer School because there was always something going on at all times. Every child could excel in something and the teacher was the key to the success of the whole thing whether it was a spelling bee, a Thanksgiving play or a reading lesson. "Miss Valda" was the spark that ignited it.

It was truly a bad day for Green County Schools when "Miss Valda" decided to retire, because she is a natural born teacher and you don't have too many like her. Also in a way I hated to see the one room school disappear, because I think the American people lost something of value that cannot be replaced by bigness, consolidation and our modern way of life.

I believe that no one could write with first hand knowledge concerning the one-room school better than Mrs Russell. She had special gifts that are given to very few people.

But it was her patience, her belief in moral values, her unique approach to teaching and her philosophy of life that made "Miss Valda's" one-room school one of the best learning situations that we have ever had in Green County.

I consider it an honor and privilege to write this foreword for her book which I know will be most interesting to many people and will preserve many memories for future generations.

Lucile Guthrie, Superintendent
Green County Schools

The Real Teacher

Numerous one-room schools dotted the hills and hollows in Kentucky in 1925 and teachers were scarce.

Only two careers were discussed for young ladies in that era—becoming a teacher or a housewife.

I was always eager to learn from the first experience as a pupil. My dad urged me on and oftentimes forced me to study when I became negligent.

It was about the fourth grade when I began to daydream about becoming a teacher some day. Although we were exceedingly poor farmers, I never anticipated the challenge that lay before me when I had finished the eighth grade and the moment came to talk about high school. But with a kind, compassionate, understanding father to lean on, the money problem was somehow ironed out and I completed four years of high school in three years.

I could teach my first school if only I could pass a State Teacher's Examination.

The room was filled with prospective teachers and the examiner was stern and cruel with no regards for our disturbed emotions. We had nothing in the world but our own wits to bring us through. Three weeks later I received the most important notice in all my life. I had passed that test and held a teacher's certificate.

In high school we never had any instructions about school records and reports and no training in methods of teaching. There I stood in a room with thirty pupils and I was more scared than they were.

The proper approach on how to organize, where to begin and how to discipline caused me to create opportunities to get away from the confusion. After many sleepless nights, I began to calm down and to learn. Yes, you never learn to drive a car till you get under the wheel, and to stand in a responsible position means that you are going to learn some real lessons. Experience is the best teacher.

A Drastic Change

In my third year of teaching I became Mrs. Charles Russell and the responsibilities of being a teacher and a housewife were punctuated by screaming demands almost beyond endurance.

The world's greatest depression struck in 1929 and our first baby came in 1933. God sent an angel to lift our spirits and renew our faith in God, but He called her away when she was two years old, just six months after our son was born.

The teaching profession was discarded and my certificate lay dormant. When my son was in the fourth grade, my superintendent asked me to take some college courses during the summer to renew my certificate and to come back into the teacher's fold. I was thrilled with this recognition.

School began in July and concluded the last of December. My meager salary was forty-three dollars each month. You modern day readers have no idea how much we could buy with forty-three dollars.

Times were hard for farmers and all the pupils came from farm homes. Everyone walked to school and brought their lunches in a bag, a shoebox or a bucket. We all sat down in a circle on the ground and ate together. Each one shared a bite or two with someone else and that made the meal a happy time. There were no soft drinks, no candy, no peanut butter—just plain food raised on the farm: corn-on-the-cob, lima beans, jam on biscuit, fried ham, boiled eggs and blackberry pie, or maybe someone would have fried apple pies with plain, cold water to drink for there were no thermos bottles to bring milk.

Everyone came barefooted till it was cold and frosted. They had never heard of tennis shoes in those schools.

There were pains and heartaches as I looked into the eyes of poor children who were destitute of life's necessities, but I always remembered that pain broadens and deepens us and teaches us patience and humility. I never tried to grasp for the stars, but did life's plain, common work as it came, for daily duty and daily bread are the sweetest things of life.

From the beginning I had a keen interest in talented children. To see a great talent reminds one of seriousness and respectibility. It has all the force and power of a genius. Listeners are awed and wideeyed when a natural-born talent slips into place, for it never lacks an audience. Talent is the inner resource which can balance our lives

even when the world reels too fast for comfort. When a teacher helps a youngster to discover early in life that he has talents and urges him to develop these to the best of his abilities, he will attain maximum ranks in the top-notch squad. It's possible that some little dirty, neglected urchin in a one-room country school had the talent to make others smile, but he was deprived of that privilege. Laughter is both pleasant and profitable. Thousands of evils and ills have been laughed out of existence. The humorous side of life, like the serious side, has its literature of untold wealth. A girl or boy who has on the armor of cheerfulness is going to be beneficial to the world. Wit and humor were constituted by God and happiness is dependent upon a soul that has holy communion with its Creator. Therefore, we always took time out for a wholesome joke or a comic act if someone preferred that. I delighted in teaching expression (or dramatics) to girls and boys, even though I only had eight months' study and drill in the subject.

In our modern schools, all the emphasis is on sports and other talents are neglected and never developed. Even our expensive schools are structured for sports, and the acoustics are not geared for public speaking, singing and acting.

Discipline: A Major Problem

The major problem in our modern schools is discipline, and we must pause to talk about that.

Children are the most wholesome part of the race, for they are fresh from the hand of God. Teaching children, whether in the home, church, or school, is a profitable investment, for their lives can bring a miraculous change to a teacher. If teachers can help pupils to achieve a hospitable attitude toward life, they can build serenity and happiness on that basis.

Discipline is very vital in every home and school. Our children are a heritage of the Lord, but woe unto us if we misuse our opportunity. An accounting will be demanded for every child committed to our care. The Bible says, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of every child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15).

Everything in our modern homes is controlled by a switch except the children. Then all the responsibility of discipline is thrown on the teacher. The majority of American children are out of control. He's full of vigor, zest, and power, but he has faulty brakes. For this reason, I sanction a limited, careful, merciful use of the paddle and without that, we'll reap the whirlwind of our lack of discipline.

When a boy comes home with an aggressive attitude and relates that the teacher has been biased in her judgment on him, the case must be handled with discretion, quiet conference and wise advice for the best results. Any sarcasm or outburst of tempers between parent and teacher will leave a scarred memory on the child.

When children say the school is a jail and the teacher is a wild cat, just remember, there are days in the lives of adults when nothing seems worthwhile and only your own emotional reserve can sustain you.

I have always been a self-confessed, strict disciplinarian because children will obey and respect a teacher or parent who demands discipline. Many of these problems can be eliminated through careful planning by the teacher. It's very seldom that a busy boy or girl will get into trouble, so keep their minds occupied. In the one-room school all the children were taught responsibility and were assigned chores such as sweeping, oiling the floor, dusting, washing and sterilizing the drinking glasses, carrying in wood and water and keeping the bathrooms clean. There was a schedule on the wall for everyone to read. When it was time for work, each one knew his time and place and there was no discord. They all shared the work.

Recreation Is A Must

There was about one acre of well-shaded playground and the schoolhouse, with a front porch, sat back near the end to leave space for play. We had an outdoor basketball court, a chinning bar, a track around the whole area, two big see-saws, a small building for a playhouse, and plenty of dirt for mud pies. We played town ball, soft ball, and baseball, and I was the pitcher and umpire.

We had box suppers to raise money for needed supplies. Our biggest turn out came when there was a county election in progress. We invited all the Republicans and all the Democrats, for we knew they would be liberal with their money. The girls brought well-filled boxes to be sold to the highest bidder. We had a cake for the prettiest girl at one cent a vote, a big watermelon was for the ugliest man. But the contest that received the most recognition was a nice, dressed hen for the worst "hen-pecked" husband. We always managed to get a Democrat and a Republican nominated for this hot race and the money would roll in. After the nominations ceased, we'd appoint a reliable citizen to keep time. They were given ten minutes to collect money for the candidates, and when the time was up the voting stopped.

At these gatherings the whole area would be covered with people—three to four hundred—and everyone, young and old, joined in the fun. We'd invite the local country music makers with their fiddles, banjos and guitars, and the music of *Old Joe Clark* and *Soldier's Joy* rang out for miles as they stood on the porch of that one-room school with a little dim light hanging down from the ceiling. This was clean, wholesome community fun that Christians thoroughly enjoyed.

When winter came and we were forced inside the schoolhouse for our activities, we almost had to hang them on the rafters and especially at Christmas. We'd begin early to prepare a big Christmas program. Every child participated and it was amusing to see parents sit on the edge of their seats straining their eyes and ears to see and hear every word the children spoke. Parents beamed with joy with each recitation. The fathers would take a day to cut and install a huge Christmas tree that reached to the ceiling. Santa was always there and everyone received a gift—I mean the parents all drew names as well as the children and this was a big affair for the community. Our tree was decorated with strings of popcorn, sycamore balls, and leaves cut from paper.

Teach the Value of Home

From my earliest days of teaching, I endeavored to instill into each child that their parents and homes were priceless treasures given to them by God.

The environment in a home is the training that lingers long in the life of a child. Home was the first school and the first church we ever knew, where fathers and mothers were respected and children were loved, where money was not so important as loving kindness and even the teakettle sang for happiness. Our spirits rise to new heights when we think of the old shade trees, the laugh or cry of children noisily scouting in every nook and corner. The farmer whistled as he plowed long, straight furrows in the soil. The sweet song of a mocking bird, the rustle of tall corn in the breeze, the smell of new mown hay, and the clasp of a friend's hand as he stopped for a chat. This was serving and sharing and being loved. God bless the closely-knit family where love and harmony rule every day! The peace will outweigh the ills. Home is a priceless stronghold away from worldly cares. It's a private place that holds contentment throughout the years. The home weaves a web of childhood days with memories to treasure. There's really no price tag that could be attached to a little old farmhouse designed from the past. Father and Mother are there and their smile is a solace and their presence, a benediction. You know, sweet old moms and dads are common but in exhaustless patience, hope, faith, and benevolence they are sure to lead the world. Many times their worth is not known and properly appreciated until they pass beyond mortal reach. Girls and boys, there's a cozy little corner that is known as Home Sweet Home, where your thoughts just keep on wandering, no matter where you roam. It's a cozy little corner and you'd like to be there, too, for it's the only place on earth where your parents wait for you.

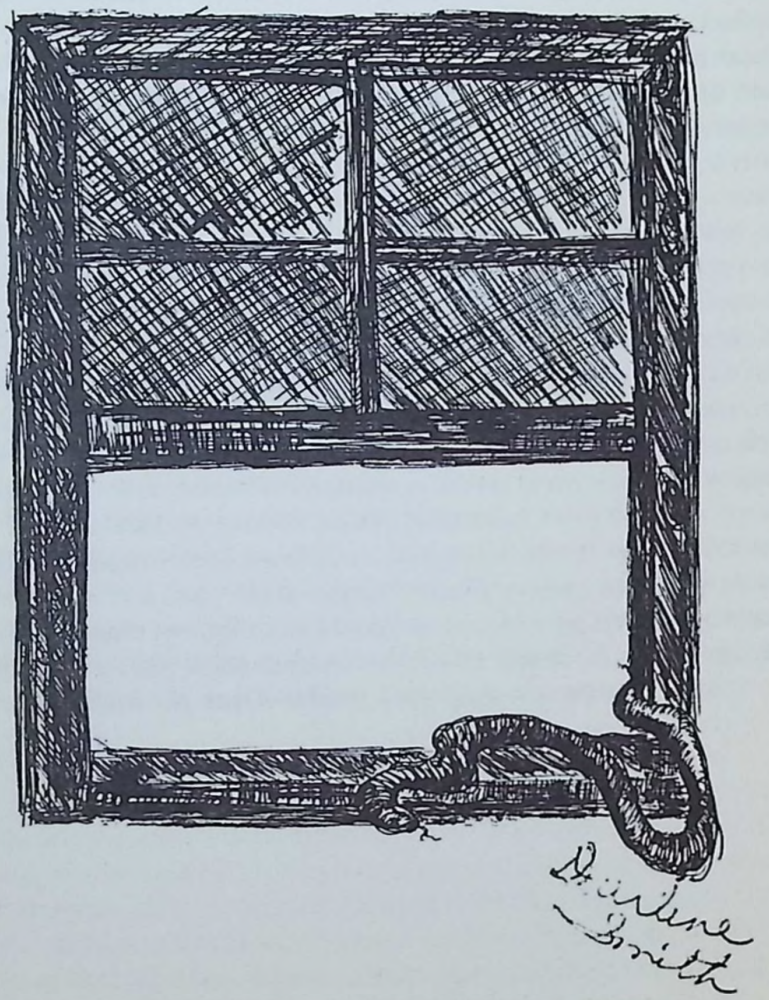
The Atheist Piped In

In those one-room schools, we never failed to have Bible reading and prayer every morning. Many, many boys and girls would never have known any Scripture, any prayer, or an inspiring thought from a story because their parents were not Christians and church attendance was out.

After the Supreme Court decision several years later abandoning Bible reading and prayer in the schools, I received a very sarcastic letter from an atheist concerning our devotionals in school, to which I replied with an invitation for him and all the members of the Supreme Court to visit our one-room school and while they were there we'd read the Bible and have prayer. They never came and there was no reply.

Unique Activities

If teachers are to impart knowledge and a love of learning, they must get children into a whirlwind of wonder and excitement, for these two words are keys to learning. The attributes that are most important to any teacher are a sense of humor and a touch of teacherly love. By paying attention to each individual, listening and caring, teachers get unmeasurable rewards from every effort.



"Look! There's a snake crawling in the window"

As I stood near the blackboard on a hot day explaining a math problem, a first grader yelled, "Look, there's a snake crawling in the window!" We forgot the math lesson and watched the older boys kill the snake. Everyone spent the afternoon working on a story about the snake: its color, length, kind, its name, and they read their stories to the group. The first and second graders made sentences about the snake and I wrote them on the board. They, too, had an interesting lesson.

Later in the week while the boys were raking leaves around a tree, they found a snake egg. The whole group watched while one boy broke the egg and we counted the baby snakes that would have hatched.

Springtime was the most fascinating of all the seasons for the children. The robins and other birds built their nests in the trees on the school ground and the pupils were as busy as the birds. They observed each nest closely to see when the babies hatched and they'd spend a whole recess watching a mother bird feed her young.

When we needed a tadpole for a science lesson, we just went across the road to a neighbor's pond and got the tadpole. Likewise, if we wanted to study a grasshopper, a cricket, a toad, a butterfly, ants, or any other creature, they were available at our fingertips. Children don't have these opportunities in big city schools.

Here's an interesting project to prove that younger children learn from activities of older ones in a one-room school. In history and geography classes we were studying Manhattan Island, The Statue of Liberty, and how we acquired them. We made feather headdresses for children in the lower grades to be Indians. The upper grade pupils used play money from the dime store and made beads out of acorns there in the schoolyard and used the money and beads to buy Manhattan Island. We used small blocks of wood to build the base of the Statue of Liberty and one child donated a doll to be used for Miss Liberty.

We dug Lake Erie on the school ground. Just a small hole and filled it with water. Then we dug the Erie Canal. The boys made miniature sail boats out of cardboard and used them for the opening of the Erie Canal. When the parents came on Friday afternoon for our P.T.A. meeting, the children were bursting with excitement as we went outside for their explanations. Those lower grade children could tell all about the canal, its purpose; and how tall the Statue of Liberty is, where we got it; the price of Manhattan Island—the entire story. May I repeat it again? Teachers in the city schools or consolidated schools can't do those things. I know. I have taught there.

Homework

Is it justifiable for a teacher to send home loads of homework that requires assistance from an adult? Who is being paid to do the teaching, the parents or the teacher? I would guess that ninety per cent of parents who have youngsters are working parents. This is a dire necessity because of the high cost of living. When the children rush in from school bringing with them an impact of bouyant life of gladness as they cross the threshold, their first wish is to eat and play. Down go the books and off go the boys with their dog, a ball, or just a rough tumble in the grass. Little girls are more reserved. They often go to mother to tell what's happened that day, but they, too, should get their share of exercise and fresh air before the night closes in. All growing things need recreation, that is if we may judge by the frisky lambs, kittens, and puppies. Surely, children who are taxed in the school room during the very best hours of the day have need of air, freedom, and games. A child must get out into different spheres than that one which immediately surrounds him. This will help him to cultivate his imagination and to develop a higher power of seeing and hearing and life will take on a new beauty and have a deeper meaning. This refreshing environment will open up new worlds for him, too many for his exploration, too many for him to ever exhaust.

After a day of frustration and complete exhaustion at a factory, store, or office, does a mother or father want to spend an evening struggling with new math or some foreign idea that was never dreamed of in their day? No. But this is happening in all our fifty states and we wonder why taxpayers refuse to vote for more school tax. Study habits should be taught in school. We have two types of children, the slow and the more talented. We have top talent in college with no study habits, without ambition and without responsibility—too often because teachers never held them to the line. The methods used in school and at home have often damned the slow child and allowed the talented to rust away. If the bright youngster will not work, he should be made to feel uncomfortable when discomfort is in order. Certainly it's a strenuous task to have work materials available to keep pupils busy all day, but that's the purpose of the teacher's salary.

Vanishing One-Room Schools

It's the memories of the one-room school that I love to recall, for it was in those humble structures where the teacher and pupils sang together, played together, saluted the flag, and shared our joys and hardships.

This type of school is almost extinct, but some of the greatest men and women of all ages had their humble beginnings sitting on a bench in a one-room school. Presidents, lawyers, doctors, nurses, bankers, farmers, teachers, preachers—the list is indefinite.

The Bible, the American flag, and the home were reverenced and respected. There was a close relationship between parents and teacher, for the school was the center of community life where we had spelling bees, box suppers, school programs, prayer service, and club meetings.

I first taught in the one-room schools, then in Greensburg Junior High School for eight years. After serving four years as an emergency high school librarian at Taylor County, Kentucky, I came back to the Ebenezer one-room school in Green County, Kentucky, and taught fifteen years before retiring in 1972. Those were my Golden Years.

As I watched our little schools being consolidated and big yellow buses carrying our children over miles of roads every day; somehow I felt that they were being deprived of meaningful experiences and that they were losing their identity. There are not enough interpersonal relationships.

When a boy enters school, he is an independent being, cast into a great social organization to which he must adapt himself. Sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly, he yields himself to the settled ways of the world.

The teacher and the school should stand for the social order and, if rightly administered, will lead children into the larger social order with ample preparation.

How important it is that parents should at least see, and if possible, know well the personality of the teacher who enters so largely into the life of the family! On the other hand, it gives a teacher a deep insight into the character of the pupil if he or she can see the parents and get a glimpse of the child's home life, as was possible in the one-room school. As pleasant and gratifying as it might seem to be visited by educators from the State Department or some well-known college, most teachers would gladly dispense with all of that in exchange for visits from parents of all pupils, which is impossible in our schools today.

Memories

As the shuttle of time weaves the web of life, it's the memories of incidents in the little one-room school that have deeply influenced my life.

In those good old days when there was harmony in the home and it spilled out into the school, the teachers were so humble and dedicated to their tasks that they never dreamed of striking for higher wages or worrying parents about a discipline problem. If a child misbehaved at school he got a paddling and another one when he got home.

The teacher more often boarded in one of the homes. Sometimes, if the house was small, the mother would expect the teacher to share her bed with one of the children. But there is no substitute for the personal touch and genuine human compassion you can receive from the close association with a child.

The teacher would share the joys and sorrows in the home where she stayed.

Once, in a poor home, a little blue-eyed boy had slipped away to be with God. One evening I sat watching that good Christian mother as she pulled out the bottom drawer of the old family bureau to look at some things that the gold of kings could never buy. There were two worn shoes, a little straw hat with part of the brim gone, some stockings, two spools, a whip, and a faded coat. Her tears bathed the precious articles as she silently wept while I dared not speak. Finally, when she was composed enough to speak, she said, "I listen for his ringing laugh but there is no sound. I never find chairs turned over or ropes tied to the door knobs. There are no little feet to wash, no prayers to say, and no voice sobbing with a hurt toe. I'd give all we own to awake and see my boy in his crib."

So they preserved those relics hoping that strangers would handle them tenderly when they were gone.

The memories that I shared with those humble parents gave me strength and power for the future.

A Big Turnaround

My four years at Taylor County High School as librarian were happy years. I loved library work and often wished that had been my major, but with only twenty-three hours in library science I was not qualified to hold the position. As soon as there was a qualified applicant for the place, I was dismissed and rightly so.

The girls and boys, parents and teachers in Taylor County were superb, and I shall always cherish the pleasant memories of my close association with them.

When I came home, a major decision confronted me. A number of parents in my community visited my home and urged me to take over the Ebenezer one-room school just four hundred yards from my house.

There would be forty-five pupils that year with all grades one through eight, and the majority of these were transported by school buses from a large area in that vicinity.

This was a challenge, and I must use descretion in making the decision. After hours of meditation with God, I was confident that I'd find the power to keep me afloat through every crisis. No problem is unsurmountable if God is there to strengthen and reassure us.

First Things First

In previous years of teaching, my first concern was getting the parents interested and involved in the school. After the second week, I sent a letter to each parent thanking them for such a fine boy or girl, and asking them to feel free to visit the school any time for a friendly talk or to discuss an unforeseen problem. A good relationship with parents results in effective teaching. When I solicited their opinions about organizing a PTA, they suggested that we combine that with the 4-H Club program and work them out together. We voted unanimously to do that, and this gave them a sense of involvement.

This was a small beginning as I groped in darkness to teach, discipline and guide disturbed teen-agers and children of all ages to a life of happiness and clean moral conduct. Morality and truthfulness are rare virtues in this age of indifference to law and order. Satan doesn't draw our children with heavy ropes, but he uses slippery silken cords. A leader must let rays of Christian sunshine flow from his or her life if we transform an unpleasant environment for mixed-up girls and boys.

Beginning in 1957, the next fifteen years of my life were spent in this one-room school, mingled with joys and heartaches, but the good always overlapped the bad. Diamonds cannot be polished without friction, and we cannot be perfected without trials. When we come head on against some drastic change, we must turn to God in utter desolation and ask for a tangible sign that all is well. Christ has established our comings and goings and He will keep us stable and give us a measure of happinesss in every difficult change.

Good Manners

Why teach good manners in school? Why not? The Bible teaches that Jesus questioned the ten lepers who were healed and only one turned to express thanks (Luke 17:15). Once a week we took fifteen minutes to teach a lesson in good manners. I stressed the importance of respect to elderly persons.

Just across the road from our school there was a little country store. Two kind, sweet Christians, Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Moore, were the owners. One morning a smart-alecky teen-age boy came in and said he had stopped to purchase some pencils at Old Man Will Moore's store. That afternoon we were having our lesson on courtesy and I asked the boy who ran the store across the road. He replied, "Old Man Will Moore," to which I snapped back, "No, he is MISTER Will Moore." With a snarly look he said, "I'm not putting a handle in nobody's name, you hear that?" I didn't have to grapple for words, and what I said had the bark on it. His countenance fell and his attitude calmed when I informed him that his report card would have straight *F*'s if he didn't shape up and fly right. The following week a neighbor asked what happened to that boy, he was calling everybody MISTER.

Politics in School

Politics are just as clean and wholesome as they ever were, the evil is the people who are crooked politicians. In social studies I stressed the need for the two political parties and taught children to vote their convictions regardless of the other person's opinion. We always held an election in school when the year came to vote for a president. Everyone voted and it was legal. No persuading or cheating.

An exceedingly intelligent farm boy was one among the many outstanding pupils at this one-room school. He was validictorian of his high school class and made the Dean's list every year in college. Today he holds a prominent government position and has had three promotions. When he was ready to leave my little school, he sat down one day to have a serious talk with me. He knew from the beginning that I loved to be teased, for that is a method of expressing love. He expressed his gratitude for my special interest in his future success and said he had observed closely while I had umpired all the ball games and was never partial or biased in my decision. Then with a cute, boyish grin he said, "How could you be that kind of lady and be a Democrat?"

I retired when I was sixty-five, but those precious children were always respectful and when my birthday came they never mentioned my age. Little personal gifts like an apple, some wild violets for a bouquet, a piece of cake, a card or just a picture they had drawn brought feelings of ecstasy to my heart. On one of these days, a pupil asked me to tell about some historical events in my life. I told the group I had lived through three wars: World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. An upper grade boy in the back of the room raised up and said, "She forgot the Civil War!" We all erupted with laughter.

Here lies the body of Miss Valda Morass. She reached for the brakes but stepped on the gas.

One day two of my eighth grade boys came to school overloaded with mischief. They wouldn't apply themselves to any working situation. Everything was funny and their giggles were becoming frequent and disturbing. I forced my patience to persist to the limit. Finally I made them stand at the blackboard for thirty minutes on one foot to restore order in the room. They were both natural born artists, so while they were being punished they decided to do some art work on the board. They drew a grave with an attractive tombstone at the head with all kinds of flowers heaped on the mound. Just below it they wrote this epitaph—"Here lies the body of Miss Valda Morass; she reached for the brakes but stepped on the gas." When I discovered what they had done, I joined with the whole group for a hearty laugh. They were not discipline problems. Just two cute teen-agers full of life and dying for attention. They got it.

I once heard a college professor say that a real, down-to-earth, consecrated teacher could take a group of children into an open garage with nothing but a Sears Roebuck Catalogue and teach some never-to-be-forgotten lessons. I agree with that man whole-heartedly. All our modern methods are okay, but I think there can be too many frills that consume too much extra time and distract from the basics that are so important for the children.

Our School Unique

Gradually the one-room schools in our county and other counties disappeared. Ebenezer was still there and going strong. To our surprise, we were beginning to receive recognition from educators and parents all over the state and out of state. This type of school was the basic foundation of all our bigger schools and it was becoming extinct.

After the article came out in the Reader's Digest about "The Little Red Schoolhouse," we began to have visitors—strangers that we never knew. A man, his wife, and two daughters from Pennsylvania were touring the states, visiting historical places. They were spending a week at Lincoln's Farm, just twenty-five miles from our school. They asked permission to bring their children there every day with their lunch boxes, drinking glasses, and an apple for recess to participate in our school work—just to say they had attended a one-room school.

A young graduate art student from the University of Louisville spent a day with us and taught art to the group for the honor of having taught in a one-room school.

College students from over the state came to observe, take pictures, interview each child, and they sat spell-bound while they watched that mode of teaching.

Make-shift materials were often used in our school with the same results as expensive materials. We used a cheap white window shade for a screen when we showed pictures in science. For a net to play tennis, the fathers gave us twine cut from bales of hay and the boys wove a net from one tree to another. The kids in this school were happy and content with all this, for they enjoyed various activities that many college students from the city never dreamed about.

When Inauguration Day came on January 20, all the children went to my home to watch the president take the oath of office on TV. Everyone sat on the floor, and even a first grader learned from this experience. Each child brought one potato and for lunch I served baked potatoes, wieners on buns, and a soft drink. This was a memorable day and it makes me sad to know that I can't relive those happy moments. We used money from our box supper and bought instruments for a rhythm band. I'm a country gal and I played the banjo with the band. Everyone joined in singing *America, the Crawdad Hole, Swing Low Sweet Chariout,* or any other song they'd select.

These children never forgot the less fortunate. At the beginning of each school year, they placed a tin can on my desk and every Friday they brought pennies, nickels, dimes, or more and at Christmas they

always sent twenty-five dollars to the Kosair Crippled Children's Home in Louisville, Kentucky.

With the help of parents our 4-H Club received top honors every year with their projects. When they came back from our county fair with purple and blue ribbons, that meant competition at the Kentucky State Fair in Louisville. Parents were as much elated with their success as the children were.

Visitors

The last five years at Ebenezer were years of constant excitement. One of those years we had visitors from seven states to stop and observe. The pupils became accustomed to this and when someone came into the room they continued their studying, project work, or class recitation without any interruption. It was imperative that they pause to answer questions and be courteous.

A strange man came one day and without my consent he began to nose around and find fault with our building. Just over the door there was a small hole in the wall through which you could see the sun on the outside. He stared at that for a moment and exclaimed, "It's a dirty shame for kids to go to school in a building with a hole in the wall!" to which an eighth grade boy replied, "Well, Mister, the difference between your school and this one, you have to pay for your air conditioning and ours is free." He left quicker than he came and never returned.

A kind, sweet lady from Florida came to visit us. She sat silently and gazed at the beautiful shade trees, the old well with a pump, the playhouse where the little girls had brought their dolls, and the songs of birds in the trees. This school was away from the sounds of motors, screeching brakes, fire alarms, and people rushing pell mell to get to the lunch room. The serenity of the place radiated authentic greatness to her, so she went back to her home and wrote this song about that one-room school.

"Oh, that little old one-room schoolhouse
That stands among the trees,

I love that little old schoolhouse
Where I learned my ABC's.

Miss Valda was our teacher
So strict, so kind and true,
She taught us to love our country
And the old red, white and blue.
Now that little old one-room school house
So deserted and alone,
Its walls still hold the memories
That linger on and on.
It's the place that's dearest to us
Wherever we may roam,
That little old one-room schoolhouse
Was just like Home Sweet Home."

That dear lady from Florida was my sister, Mrs. Myrtle Rowe.

Excitement and Struggle

Excitement ran high the day I received a call from WAVE TV in Louisville asking if they could come for pictures, and interviews, and later my little school would appear on NBC TV coast to coast. It all really happened. I received letters from Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Galveston, Dayton, Sioux City, Nashville, Memphis, Boston, and many, many other towns and cities. This put my little school on the map, and I'm still sitting on cloud nine, thrilled beyond expression.

Both the teacher and pupils encounter peaks and valleys in their everyday struggle for education. Weather conditions, colds, flu, the desire to be outside and dozens of other unforeseen problems interrupt plans and create discouragement. It was at these times that parents really displayed their interest and love for the school. Once on a cold day a mother came with half a bushel of nice, ripe apples to treat the group. Another mother baked cookies to perk up spirits on a dreary day. A note was dropped on my desk with these words, "I remembered to call your name in prayer for all of your efforts." These were just a few of the thousands of cheerful deeds from the parents who were deeply interested and could be depended upon to respond when help was needed.

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Time to Smile

Children are everybody's business.

Are they problems? I read this story somewhere years ago and it will lift your spirits, for I know you will laugh.

A young, inexperienced teacher knew nothing about how to discipline her pupils. When one misbehaved, she'd go to the home after school to tell the parents, thinking this would solve her problems. One afternoon she called on Mrs. Seaborne and, to her surprise, she saw she was the mother of thirteen children. She had only sent five to school. The teacher was all frizzed up about her unanswerable problems when Rastus came rushing in and reported that the two-year-old had fallen into a barrel of pitch that the road hands had left on the side of the road. After fishing him out of the barrel with all but the white of his eyes covered with pitch, the teacher heard the mother mutter to herself, "I'll be dogged, if I don't think it would be easier to have another one than to clean that one up."

That teacher slipped quietly away, realizing that all her problems were minor when compared to that mother.

The End Results

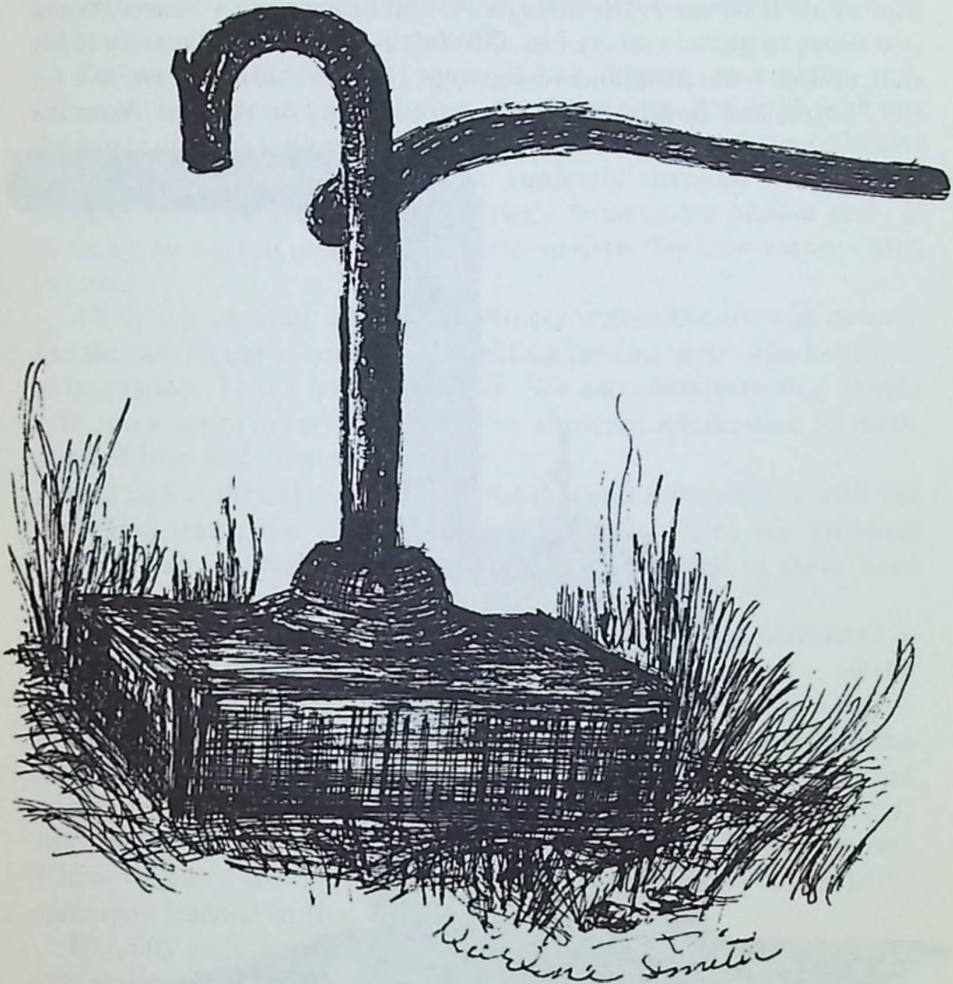
The little one-room school turned out girls and boys who have made a mark in the world, and when I meet them or communicate by phone or letter, they express gratitude for the many lessons learned in the humble environment. There were teachers, high school and elementary; one college president; another teaches in Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee; five high school validictorians; a medical technician; progressive farmers; business men and women; superlative mothers and housekeepers.

A recent visit from a former pupil filled my life full to the brim with happiness as he sat in my living room and talked for more than two hours. He was something special. Good looking, vivacious, and tremendously alive. He could converse joyously on things that concern us most. He was a living example of one who heeded the advice to, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). He loved clean, wholesome sports. Sports rock with stimulation; it is healthy and invigorating and constructive. It's good training in fighting for victory, and it will teach you to fight for Christian victory.

The adulation I have for my former pupils has an electrical effect on my life. In all my writings, I have carefully avoided calling any names, for I could never personate each one, there are just too many. To leave out a single one would be unfortunate as they have all expressed a desire to read this book.

Two More Books

Some fascinating stories are going to unfold when I write my other two books. The one, "Tales of Junior High School," and the other, "Memories of Taylor County High School." In both of these schools I worked with teen-agers and they are the kids that really keep you on your toes. Their eagerness to learn everything will cause them to pry into personal lives in order to find the answers, but adolesence is a wake-up period and the far-out incidents that happened will have you laughing, crying, and just plain puzzled. Our trips to Mammoth Cave, Grand Ole Opry, Lincoln's Farm, State Fair, Washington, D.C., Transylvania College, and the ups and downs of everyday learning will make you wish you could drift back through the years and relive it again.



The old faithful well pump

Retirement and Growing Old

We never get too old to seek wisdom. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding" (Proverbs 3:13). Wisdom is the world's short suit. We can't get it from a genius in his twenties and thirties, we must seek it from mature minds.

Don't think of retirement as a time to slow down, stagnate, and get into a rut. If we are really alive, we'll still be growing at ninety. When you cease to grow, you are old. Growth is the elemental quality of life that makes it exciting and rewarding. Have outside interest; live for the future, and don't sit around concentrating on the past. Your life

The old pot-bellied stove

should be like a river—small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, while rushing past great waterfalls. Gradually the river grows wider, the waters flow more quietly, and in the end they become merged in the sea.

In our youth we had very little time for deep thinking. We lacked the knowledge of life, the experience and understanding to make our thoughts fruitful. But in older years, our minds are brimming full of raw material for enriching thoughts. We must make our interests gradually wider and more impersonal, then we will become increasingly merged into the universal life.

Today if we could pull some of the dignity and plain, old-fashioned honesty and good living out of the past, it would perfume the winds of sin that blow and give beauty to our society. It would also give dignity to many who wander aimlessly through life without purpose. Let's be glad for the guidance from older people and, in humility, let's admit that they did better in their day than we are doing in ours.

There is a vacuum, a secret loneliness within the lives of people, and they are trying to conceal it by hiding behind their title, position, or reputation. That's not the answer. We can transform that loneliness into a happy, creative attitude by showing wholesome relationships of love and trust with others.

As I look at the old one-room school that still stands today with the pot-bellied stove, the old faithful water pump where the children enjoyed fresh air, sunshine, and dirt, I realize that all of these have increasingly become a part of a romanticized past.

Twice a year the election is held in that building. I am permitted to keep a key to the door so I can go in and out to clean the floor, oil the stove to prevent rust, and if there is any wind damage, we make repairs.

Every girl and boy in Green County has the highest respect for the Ebenezer school building. When Halloween comes and pranksters are tricking throughout the county, and sometimes destroying property, they never bother the old schoolhouse. A deep feeling of respect seems to have saturated the lives of those who were influenced by the principles they learned in that hallowed spot.

Humility grips my soul when I think of the times I'd take a poor, little neglected hand in mine and we'd walk down among the trees and there engage in pure, innocent communication with a little soul that was starving for love.

Did I learn? Yes, through trial and error we become better people, and I want to thank God for all the precious children who have crossed my pathway during my thirty-one years of teaching.

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About the Author

Mrs. Valda Akin Russell, Greensburg, Kentucky is the last of the one-room school teachers in that area of Kentucky.

As she writes, she draws upon the rich store of experience she has had with pupils from the first through the twelfth grades.

Having taught in the one-room schools as a beginning teacher, Junior High School for eight years and served as an emergency high school librarian for four years, she spent her last fifteen years in the Ebenezer one-room school before retiring in 1972.

She has a B.S. degree from Campbellsville College and thirty-one years of teaching experience. She has served as Sunday School teacher at the Ebenezer Presbyterian Church in her community for thirty-four years. Her husband, Mr. C. W. Russell is a retired farmer. They have one son, Mr. Don Russell who is owner and president of Southway Builders Construction Company in Springfield, Illinois. He and his wife Marilyn have three children, Evan, Jo, and Maria.

"Miss" Valda's straightforward, plainly written ideas on good morals, discipline, respect for the elderly, Bible reading and prayer in schools and the building of clean character should fascinate both young and old as she combines common sense with humor.

After you have read the last chapter you can easily understand her astride this horse going for a ride on their small farm with her three grandchildren at seventy years old.

BOOK